

The Trial and Peter

Last 24 Hours of Christ

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

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Bible Text: Luke 22:54-68; John 18:15-18

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Crossroads Ministries

301 S. 8th Street

Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

This morning the subject matter that we're going to deal with is actually contained in all four of the gospels of the New Testament but today I'm going to encourage you to turn to two of those, the gospel of Luke 22 and the gospel of John 18. If you are a guest or a visitor with us, let me welcome you to a journey not through a respective gospel or even the totality of the gospels but really focusing on what the gospels focus on.

You may or may not be aware that the gospel accounts give a very inordinate amount of attention to the last week in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, in particular to the last 24 hours. You know, oftentimes we'll see a miracle or hear a sermon from the lips of Jesus and it's one of the gospels or in some of the gospels but not all of the gospels and yet as you walk through the last 24 hours of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, we discover that almost every single event is so important that it is in all four and such is today. Now we're only going to be in Luke 22 and John 18 but we're going to look at the event where Peter denies the Lord. And today, again, as we often have, is not an event to be relegated to the volumes of history. We're going to be looking back at what occurred that fateful evening but remember when we walk through the questions today when we get to the final question, we're going to discover that what happened in Peter's life is very prophetic to what is happening in the world you and I are living in today as well.

Luke 22, we're going to begin in verse 54. Now let me set the stage. Judas has come and betrayed the Lord with a kiss. There have been 500 soldiers with torches and weapons. They ask if this was Jesus of Nazareth. He answered, "Yes, I am." They all fall back. They come back. They take him into custody. Peter cuts off the ear of Malchus. Jesus heals his ear. The disciples go running like cockroaches in the daylight. Chaos has ensued. Verse 54,

54 Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. 55 And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. 56 But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. 57 And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. 58 And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not.

59 And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaean. 60 And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. 61 And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. 62 And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

Now let me encourage you to turn to John 18. There's a scenario here in the Johannine or the gospel of John account that's very important to use as we compare and contrast Peter's actions and his words. Beginning in verse 15 of chapter 18 it says,

15 And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. 16 But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. 17 Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not. 18 And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself.

Again, one of the most famous events not only in the entirety of scripture but most importantly in these hours before the crucifixion and eventual resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So we begin of the "when." Now we could look at it chronologically. It was pretty much right or a little after midnight. It is in the dead of the night, but more importantly as I mentioned earlier, Jesus Christ has just been betrayed by Judas, it took 500 men, although it didn't require that many, it took 500 to bring him into captivity. They make their way to Caiaphas' house. Now the event that we will study next is what we call the trial of Jesus and Pilate. Now some of you may be thinking, "Well, this is the trial," and you're right because the trial of Jesus Christ took place over a period of about 8-9 hours and involved two major phases: you've got the Jewish phase which is what we're addressing today where he's there in front of the Sanhedrin, the high priest, and then they at the break of dawn will turn him over to the Romans. You may remember that the high priest will declare that he has spoken blasphemy, he will rent his clothes in two, and next week we'll find ourselves on the front steps of Pilate's palace. But in between there's Peter, the same man who said, "Lord, no matter what happens to you, I will never forsake you." The same man when Jesus questioned him and said, "Who do you say that I am," he said, "You are the Christ the Son of the living God." So what we're addressing today isn't a Peter problem exclusively, it can unfortunately become an all of us problem.

That's when it took place. Now let's talk about the "who." Obviously we know Simon Peter, he's one of those characters in the Bible that we know pretty well, but it's this other character that I want to call your attention to. Notice in the gospel of John 18:15 it says

that Simon Peter followed Jesus and so did another disciple, and not only in this verse but in the next verse it says because he was known unto the high priest. Now there's really two streams of thought on who this person is. There's a group of people who believe that this is the Apostle John. Why would it be the Apostle John? Because he is the beloved disciple, he is the one who within the gospel of John never just calls himself out and says, "I'm the brother of James, the son of Zebedee," he kind of just gives us these hints like the one who laid upon him when they were at dinner, the one who never left him, because in John 19 when Jesus Christ goes to the cross, the only one of the "disciples" that will be there is whom we know as the Apostle John. So it rightfully makes sense to say, well, this John never left his side, he was the one. Here's the issue with that and, by the way, there's no problem if that's the one that you agree with. It says twice he was known to the high priest. Now the high priest was not in our terminology a spiritual leader. Think in Jesus' day, the Sanhedrin, the Pharisees, the scribes, the high priest, they were more political power brokers than they were anything else. Why is that critical? Because the disciples were the exact antithesis of political power brokers. These were fishermen and laborers who Jesus called by the sea of Galilee.

Now there is the possibility that he had some family connection to Caiaphas but there's another possibility. There are those that believe this was Nicodemus. Remember the man who came to Jesus by night in John 3 and said, "How can a man be born again? I don't understand what you're saying, Jesus." This same Nicodemus is the same man that in John 19 when Joseph of Arimathea is preparing the burial site, it will be Nicodemus who actually helps him lower the body and provides the means to prepare his body, and it was this same Nicodemus that in John 7, the same group that's gathered here to "crucify" Jesus is the same group that desired to do so earlier. Nicodemus pipes up, remember he was one of them, Jesus called him a master of Israel, this would have been his people, so to speak. What happens there? They said, "Oh, we need to take this Jesus," and Nicodemus says, "How can we condemn a man without hearing him out first?" Do you remember what those guys said? "Are you one of his disciples as well?"

So you see kind of this process with Nicodemus and, again, whether it be John or whether it be Nicodemus, one thing we know is this: in the most intense hour of the trial of Jesus Christ, Peter's out on the porch warming his hands and an unnamed disciple is right beside him. Then there's this group of strangers. We know that the first denial is a young lady. We know there is a man that pipes up later. But notice in the accounts that we read that Peter is outside warming himself by the fire. Notice what the Bible says: there were soldiers there. The same men that brought Jesus to Caiaphas' palace were there as well. So everything that Peter says was not an isolated conversation. This is not one of those private messages, so to speak, that they were having with each other. Everything spoken would have not only been heard by Jesus, we'll get to that in just a moment, would have been heard by those who were charged with the same instructions that if anybody else joined with Jesus' identification.

But it is the "where" that gets me. This is the part where when you begin to kind of look at how the scene evolves, it's the "where" it took place. Now this is Caiaphas' house and that may not seem significant to you, but if you've ever had the privilege of traveling to

the Holy Land, if you've ever had the privilege of touring Israel and Jerusalem, you'll understand what I'm about to mean. If you have not, we're beginning to kind of see things open up again, hopefully we'll have that opportunity in the days moving forward. But when you go to Israel they usually give you a tour guide, they have to give you a tour guide. That tour guide is very well-versed in history and in the Old Testament but let me share with you what happens about 80-85% of the time. Now for those of you listening on the radio, this is a visual so I apologize, okay? Typically you go to a site, everybody gets off the bus and at some point the tour guide will say, "On my right hand is where many people believe this event took place. On my left hand is where other people believe this event took place. Behind me there's another group that thinks that's where it took place. We don't exactly know where but it was somewhere around here." That's the tour and I give you an absolute guarantee when you go to a specific place, if they've built a church on that site, that is exactly where it did not happen.

Okay, so nonetheless, everything's very generalized except in this case. You see, when we talk about Caiaphas' palace, there's only one building that matches the description. It's on the south side of the Temple Mount. If and when you visit it, you will discover that below where the servants met was where they would bring the prisoners. There was a dungeon, for lack of better terms, and I've been there, I've seen it with my own eyes, I've touched it with my own hands where they would lower a rope to be put around the one who was being indicted and they would bring him up into the center of these men who would determine the said individual's fate. That's not the part that's most important, it's where Peter was. Notice what it says that he was on the outside. In fact, the gospel of Mark says he was on the porch. I've been on that porch and I've seen where Peter would have stood, and I've seen where Jesus would have had to have been because this is the only place that it could happen. You say, "Why is that so significant?" Because we read stories about Peter denying him, the gospel of Mark says he was cursing and using foul language, and we oftentimes think somewhere across the way, maybe around the bend, but if you were to go to that porch today and stand where Peter stood and see where Jesus had to be, it's no more than about 10 yards. That's it. Do you know what you can do within 10 yards? You can look in people's eyes. Notice it says at the end of the passage, "and Jesus looked upon him." This isn't an account of on the other side. This didn't happen in isolation. In fact, Jesus and Peter were in such close proximity they could have a conversation without ever saying a word.

So let's lead to the "what," what happens? Back to Luke 22. I want you to first see that there's a very distinct pattern in Peter's life, a lesson for each and every one of us. Verse 54, notice where Peter is. It says he followed Jesus, how? There's a description: afar off. There's distance between him and Jesus. Then you get to verse 57, he denies him. You get to verse 62 and it says, "and he went out and he wept bitterly." Now when the Bible says he wept bitterly, I don't know if you've ever had one of those times in life where you're so emotional, you're so "wrung out" you can't even stand up. You know, in my life I have the opportunity on numerous occasions to have people weep bitterly in front of me. You say, "Why is that?" Because when your life is falling apart and things have gone sideways, rarely if ever do you call the pastor first. We're usually the last one you call. Everything is out of sorts. Everything is out of order. The emotions have been building

and all of a sudden you sit down in front of me with a box of Kleenex and it's over and you just weep. I see it on a regular basis. You say, "Why is that so important?" Do you know what I've never heard come out of anybody's mouth? I've never heard somebody wrapped up in sin, I've never heard somebody whose life is completely sideways say, "Pastor, I don't know how this happened. I'm in Bible study every day. I pray all the time. I never miss church. How is my life so upside down?" Do you know what people usually say to me? "I should have seen this coming."

How does he begin? Afar off. You see, there's a pattern here. When we begin to allow distance between us and Jesus, denial starts happening, weeping starts happening. Let me make it a little more relevant. Did you know that Peter woke up that morning and he did not say, "Today I'm denying Jesus." He didn't do it. Nobody wakes up and says, "Today I'll become a drunk." No. It's progressive, isn't it, and it always starts with having distance between you and the Lord and the pattern is lest we learn from him where we can end up just like him.

But it's also a picture, it's a picture of what sin looks like in our life. I mean, he's fallen afar off and for whatever reason it seems somewhat benign at first until the young lady comes up, and then the man arrives and according to the other gospels he starts using foul language. Let me give you an old adage about sin. You may have heard this but if not you need to, okay? Sin will take you further than you ever want to go, it will cost you more than you ever want to pay, and it will keep you longer than you ever want to stay. And that's exactly what sin does in our life. Peter did not design this, he did not want this, this was not what he had hoped for his life when he woke up that morning much less the three years walking with Jesus but it happened when he was distance from, he was afar, and it's a picture to us of what happens when we allow sin to seep in our lives being unaddressed. If we do not address it, it incrementally progressively will take us to a place where we never intended to be. Hear me clearly: Peter never wanted to be here. And when people sit across from me with their lives in shreds, I've never had anybody say, "Man, this is exactly how I wanted it to be."

It's a picture but it's also very prophetic. You say, "Well, how is it prophetic?" You understand that in this story Jesus is on trial. He is on trial at such a level that they cannot find an accusation that will stick. In fact, if you read the other gospel accounts here's what we discover, that they so desperately wanted to incriminate him that they actually made up lies, got two people to agree to lie so that technically he could be charged with what they wanted to charge him with and sent to the Romans. Why is this prophetic today? Because if you haven't realized it or not, biblical Christianity is on trial. You know, it's interesting what we're accused of. It's much like Jesus. You see, Jesus was not found guilty of anything he was actually guilty of. He was found guilty of something he had nothing to do with. Allow me to put it in today's terminology. Can I share with you what biblical Christianity is really guilty of? I'll tell you we are guilty of providing hospitals for people who are sick, who can't pay for it, so we take care of the bill. We're guilty of that. Did you know we're guilty that when hurricanes and tornadoes show up, we give of our own money and we send people to help and we never send an invoice. Guilty.

So what has the world done? Do you know what the world has done? We can't charge them based on what they've actually done because that's been official so let's make up a lie. They hurt our feelings. Oh, we went there, because that's the charge that the world is presenting, is it not? "Those Christians, they don't see me the way I see me. They hurt my feelings." Jesus was not even guilty of what they charged him with and yet you and I today, we're facing the same trial and do you know what the Bible says in the last days, 2 Thessalonians 2, there's going to be a great falling away. In the last days as we get closer to Jesus' return, there's going to be a whole lot more "Peter's show up." You say, "What do you mean?" As Christianity comes under fire, as it's being accused of things it's not even guilty of, you've got people out on the porch going, "I don't know who they are. I don't want to have anything to do with them." Let me give you some information. Did you know it's not the lost world that is harming "biblical Christianity," it's those who claim to be Christians who are staying silent or cussing us out because we won't forsake what is true.

That's the world we're living in today. It's not just a picture, it's prophetic. So why is this relevant? How does this play out? Well, go back to verse 54. I want you to notice the pattern again, afar off, and I want you to ask yourself a very important question. Now today either in person or online I may be preaching to the proverbial choir, but how is your distance with Jesus? Where are you? Because one of the things that our culture provides us so easily that is so attractive is that I can always attend that Bible study, I can never do this event. I can always have access to whatever it may be. And what happens is we fall in this trap of distancing ourselves and it's not that critical, it's not that important, and you and I need to do a very important self-examination of ourselves and say are we distanced or are we right where Jesus is?

But it's also a picture for us of what compromise looks like. You say, "Compromise?" Let me give you a definition of what it means to compromise: compromise is when you trade an eternal truth for a temporary pleasure or blessing. Is that not what Peter did? He said, "I'm not going to identify with Jesus because I want to save my hide," literally. People thought ill of him. They began to question him, "Are you not one of them?" And how many of us today literally deny the Lord so that people will not think ill of us? Or that possibly we will not have some type of economic or physical detriment?

Now let me put those two together for just a moment. Notice he follows afar off and he compromises. Is that not how it works in our world today? Those of you that either, A, are employed by somebody else or you employ others, can I give you an adage? It's somewhat humorous but it's real: when the cat is away, oh, the mice do play. Guys, those of you that play sports, young people, how do you act at practice when the coach is right next to you versus when he's in the field house? Big different, right? In other words, it's real easy for us to look at Peter and go, "Man, I can't believe he did what he did." But when we allow ourselves not only to grow distant from the Lord but to no longer have the supervision we need, we start compromising. We don't run the laps we're supposed to run. We don't do the reports we're supposed to do.

That's exactly what happened because he was afar off, and then, finally, the prophetic. I mentioned earlier very importantly that when Peter stood on that porch, it might have been about a 10 yard difference, enough to where they could see eyeball to eyeball, you know, we talk a lot about it because the Bible supports it, do you know there's more passages in the Bible about the second coming of Christ than the first coming? And the Bible warns us not to set dates, I understand. The Bible warns us about marking calendars and saying, "This is when it's going to happen." So let me give you the Meyers' guide to predicting when Jesus is going to come back. Are you ready? We're closer today than we were yesterday. There you go. That's it. And if tomorrow comes, we're closer then.

But if you look at the Bible just through rudimentary prophetic lenses, I've been on planet earth for almost half a century and I can promise you we are closer to his return today than we were 50 years ago. In fact, you look back 10 years ago, 10 days ago. Why is that important? If you will allow me the analogy, if you'll allow me the visual, you and I are 2,000 years this side of the empty tomb. We have the privilege of not only seeing what took place, how humanity has responded, but we're seeing what the Bible says about the "end times" being played out before our very eyes. And so visually, just work with the analogy, Jesus is closer to us than he was in days past.

Now I know he comes in a moment, the twinkling of an eye, I get all that but work with the analogy. So if Jesus is as close to us now as he's ever been, might it be he's about 10 yards away? You see, in days past the church had the privilege of saying, "Woo, it's a long ways off. We'll just do what we want to do." Nowadays we don't have that privilege. I'm going to be honest, it wouldn't surprise me one bit if we didn't make the evening service tonight because he called us home. It wouldn't shock me at all. So per the analogy about 10 yards away which means that when we pull a Peter, we're looking at him eyeball to eyeball saying, "I know you're about to step foot out of the heavens but I'm gonna do it anyway." Woo.

You see, Peter is a picture prophetically of us. You see, today we have a decision to make. There are two individuals in this passage, one on the porch cursing, yelling and denying, and one on the inside right where Jesus is, and lest you question what happened to him, there is one thing we know for certain, he did not end up being crucified with Jesus because the two men on the side of Jesus were two thieves, not this man. Peter's greatest fears weren't even realized by the one who was on the inside. So today we've got a decision to make, are we going to keep our distance for self-preservation, or are we going to "get in the proverbial fire with the Lord," because the safest place in the world is right where Jesus is.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe today as we hear the challenge about Peter and this other disciple, maybe you're in person here, maybe you're online, maybe you're listening on the radio, but maybe the Spirit of God took the word of God and it really pierced your heart and today is not necessarily about being afar away, maybe today you say, "You know, I'm not even a believer but, man, now I understand how important it is." You know, the Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, and maybe you're that person today. You know, when the Bible says call

on the name of the Lord to be saved, it doesn't mean to pass a test, it doesn't mean to jump through a hoop, it doesn't mean to check off a box, it means just to confess that you're a sinner in need of saving. And maybe today you're that person, let me encourage you it's not about the prescription of words that you say, it's about the intent of your heart. Maybe today your conversation with the Lord would go something like this, "God, I recognize that I have sinned. God, I have messed up. I've been in the wrong places with the wrong people doing the wrong things with the wrong attitude and, God, I understand that the wages, the result of my sin according to your Bible is death, but I also understand that verse says but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Today, God, I believe, I believe I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can solve. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to be born on my behalf, he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf, he was willing to pay the price of my sin on his cross and, God, I believe that when Jesus Christ rose from the dead he made it feasible, he made it possible for my sin to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to the issues, the struggles and the problems of this old world but there's one thing I do know, I've got a sin problem that nothing and nobody can solve but Jesus. In the best way I know, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today who had that conversation with the Lord like we've seen in other services, I'll just encourage you in a moment as I pray and when we stand just to step out and step forward. Or maybe today you're like one of those eight individuals that went through the baptism waters here and you're already a believer, you just need to testify to the world at large. Or maybe you're like the many families today who said, "You know what? We're saved, we're baptized, we just want this to be our home, our faith home." We encourage you today, we're here for you, we'd love the privilege of celebrating with you and praying with and for you.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, God, thank you that as we began this service, you are a God of amazing grace. We don't deserve to be forgiven. We don't deserve to be saved. We do not deserve to be in a right relationship with you but, God, you're offered it because of your great love for us. May we as we close this service, may we make that decision for you and you alone. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.